

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Lesson Plan for Thursday – October 3, 2013

Conversation #2 – “*Psalms – a book of prayers and poetry*”

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Our objectives for this Thursday’s Conversation:

- to feel comfortable sharing with others personal ideas, feelings, and experiences as they relate to The Psalms; and, in the process strengthen our SAKLC fellowship.
- to identify a variety of names and titles that the psalmists used for God.
- to be at ease addressing God in prayer by employing diverse and expressive terms, rather than constantly using familiar names and/or titles, thus enhancing our divine/human relationship.
- to be able to describe the characteristics of 5 different types of Hebrew poetry
- to find examples in selected psalms of synonymous, synthetic, comparative and antithetic parallelism

AN OPENING PRAYER OF WORSHIP AND PRAISE ... (select portions of **PSALM 27**)

- 1) **The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?**
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
- 4) **One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:**
*to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.*
- 5) **For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;**
*he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.*
- 7) **Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!**
8) *“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, LORD, do I seek.*
- 9) **Do not hide your face from me.**
*Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!*
10) *If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up.*

- 11) **Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.**
- 12) **Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.**
- 13) **I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.**
¹⁴⁾ **Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD! AMEN!**

CONVERSATIONS HOUSEKEEPING MATTERS:

- Review Opening Prayer – mixture of selected verses to illustrate “trust” and “lament.”
- Are there any vss. that spoke to you in a special way?
- Can you differentiate between the vss. of “trust” and “lament”?
- Introduction of participants using registration sheet; some participants may be requested to answer the question: How do you most often address “God” in your private prayers?
- Answers to last week’s “Psalm Types Practicum” – distribution of Resource Sheet 1D (persons participating exclusively by email will get answers on an attachment sheet with Lesson Plan #3)

A) THE HOLY NAME FOR GOD (“YAHWEH” or “YHWH”)

- Think of the importance attached to a name! Your name! For some people this is an extremely important issue! A name designates a ‘self;’ one that has a particular history, a unique life story. To be introduced to another person by name, if that introduction leads to a relationship, is to some degree an entrance into the life story of the other person who bears that name.
- Now, consider the even greater importance which the Israelites attached to the name of their God! (see example directly below)

Exodus 3:13-15 - (NRSV)

13 But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14 God said to Moses, “I am who I am.”[a] He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” 15 God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord,[b] the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Footnotes:

a. Exodus 3:14 Or I am what I am or I will be what I will be

b. Exodus 3:15 The word “Lord” when spelled with capital letters stands for the divine name, YHWH, which is here connected with the verb *hayah*, “to be”

- From ancient times, God’s people were admonished not to misuse the divine name
- Exodus 20:7 (NRSV)
 - ⁷ *You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.*
- One way to keep God’s name holy, and not to misuse it, was to refrain from speaking it at all; because - even without realizing it - a person might misuse it, and thereby rendered being a ‘sinner.’
- Therefore, the Psalmists used many other names to identify God, and/or to indicate divine attributes.

GROUP EXERCISE – Form groups of 3-5 persons; then, in the span of 8-10 minutes

- a) quickly introduce yourself to other group members
- b) group will scan Psalms suggested below to identify names/adjectives that are used to describe God...
- c) please record those divine names/adjectives to share with whole assembly!
- d) Suggest you scan some of the following psalms:

3	7	18	24	27	28
46	47	59	68	80	84
86	89	91	94	95	

- Psalms, as a literary form, *were not unique to Israel*; these psalm forms were also used by other ancient near-eastern neighbors (*Egyptians, Sumerians, Canaanites, Hittites*) What is unique about Israel’s use is that they are praises of YHWH, the god of Israel. This new speech carried over idioms from the past (*i.e. PS. 95:3 = “A GREAT KING ABOVE ALL GODS”*) Thus, Israel poured new content into the ancient forms used by other cultures.
- Many Psalms are similar in form and content to those composed by Israel’s neighbors. As an example consider the following passage from a hymn to the Moon-God, ‘SIN,’ which 20th century archaeologists discovered at the site of Nineveh, an ancient capital of the Assyrian empire. In its present form it dates from about the time of Jeremiah (7th Century B. C. E.), but the tablet states that it was copied from an older edition.

(Note: This translation appears in ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS RELATING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, James Pritchard, editor, Princeton University Press – 1969, pp. 385-86)

***“O Lord, decider of the destinies of heaven and earth, whose word no one alters,
Who controls water and fire, leader of living creatures, what god is like thee?
In heaven who is exalted? Thou! Thou alone art exalted.
On earth who is exalted? Thou! Thou alone art exalted.
Thou! When thy word is pronounced in heaven the Igigi ^{a} prostrate themselves.
Thou! When thy word is pronounced on earth the Anunnaki ^{b} kiss the ground.
Thou! When thy word drifts along in heaven like the wind it makes rich the
feeding and drinking of the land.
Thou! When thy word settles down on the earth green vegetation is produced.
Thou! Thy word makes fat the sheepfold and the stall; it makes living creatures
widespread.
Thou! Thy word causes truth and justice to be, so that the people speak the
truth.
Thou! Thy word which is far away in heaven, which is hidden in the earth, is
something no one sees.
Thou! Who can comprehend thy word, who can equal it?
O Lord, in heaven as to dominion, on earth as to valor, among the gods thy
brothers, thou hast not a rival.”***

Footnotes:

{a} Igigi are the great gods of heaven.

{b} Anunnaki are the gods of the earth and netherworld

NOW COMPARE - that which is above, with passages from Israel’s psalms that raise the question:

“Who is like thee, O YHWH, among the gods? “

see especially: – Psalm 86:8-10

Psalm 89:5-14

- **Recognize that it is one of the geniuses of Jewish-Christian tradition to be able to incorporate what has existed in other systems of belief and reapply it!**

- **Most frequently used title for naming God in the Psalms is “Lord.”** (used 738x in Psalms!)
- **In most Bibles “Lord” is printed in capital letters. An explanation for this usage is found in an “Introduction” that biblical scholar, Bruce M. Metzger, wrote for the NRSV Bible.** *“This represents the traditional manner in English versions of rendering the Divine Name ... following the precedent of the ancient Greek and Latin translators and the long established practice in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue. While it is almost if not quite certain that the Name was originally pronounced “Yahweh,” this pronunciation was not indicated when the Masoretes added vowel sounds to the consonantal Hebrew text. To the four consonants YHWH of the Name, which had come to be regarded as too sacred to be pronounced, they attached vowel signs indicating that in its place should be read the Hebrew word ADONAI meaning ‘Lord’ (or ELOHIM meaning ‘God’) Ancient Greek translators employed the word KYRIOS (‘Lord’) for the Name. The Vulgate likewise used the Latin word DOMINUS (‘Lord’)”.*

CONCLUSION: In our prayers to God, and in our conversations about God, we would be well advised not to limit our vocabulary to just a few terms of address and description. If we use only “Father,” or “Lord,” or “Creator God,” we are limiting who God is and can be for us. The psalms provide us with good models: Pray to God with as diverse and expressive a vocabulary as possible. You may discover in so doing that your understanding of and relationship to God will be significantly enhanced!

B) THE PSALMS AS POETRY *(all 150 selections in Book of Psalms are composed as poetry!)*

- **C S Lewis**, (Reflections on the Psalms, Houghton, Mifflin Harcourt 1958, 1986) **views this as significant:** *“The Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry It seems to me appropriate, almost inevitable, that when the great imagination which in the beginning, for its own delight and for the delight of men and angels and (in their proper mode) of beasts, had invented and formed the whole world of Nature, submitted to express itself in human speech, that speech should sometimes be poetry. For poetry too is a little incarnation, giving body to what had been before invisible and inaudible. “*
- **What images, impressions, or feelings come to your mind when you hear the words poetry or poem?**

- **Understanding the Psalms as poetry is a relatively recent development.** At first, when the Hebrew texts were written on scrolls, lines were usually run together to save space. Early Christians seemed disinterested in the literary quality of the Psalms, but in their theological – or better, their “Christological” – meaning. It was not until mid-18th century (*approx. time of Mozart*) that the poetic features were discovered and emphasized. [importance of Robert Lowth, Bishop of Oxford, England, who in 1753 published in Latin & in 1813 in English: LECTURES ON THE SACRED POETRY OF THE HEBREWS, and provided the first appreciation of poetic parallelism in modern times.]
- **What is Parallelism?** – simply stated, when poetic lines which are constructed symmetrically, so that there is a balance or correspondence between 2 or 3 lines: *see examples in the following –*

PSALM 103:1 (*notice how in “B” the psalmist invokes his total being {self} to praise God*)

- A. **Bless [Praise] the LORD [YHWH], O my soul,**
- B. **and all that is within me, bless [praise] his [God’s] holy name.**

PSALM 24:1 (*“B” intensifies “A” by moving from everything to all beings who dwell in the earth”*)

- A. **The earth is the LORD’s [YHWH] and all that is in it,**
- B. **the world, and those who live in it;**

PSALM 1:6 (*here parallelism balances the meaning of “A” by stating the opposite in “B”*)

- A. **for the LORD [YHWH] watches over the way of the righteous,**
- B. **but the way of the wicked will perish.**

PSALM 95:3 (*here line “B” continues the thought of line “A” by ascending toward a climax; this passage also presents an example of ‘gapping’ in which the 2nd verb is omitted in line “B” so that the psalm can move forward with an economy of language.)*)

- A. **For the LORD [YHWH] is a great God,**
- B. **and a great King above all gods.**

NAMES/CHARACTERISTICS of 5 types of Hebrew poetry in The Psalms

- 1) **SYNONYMOUS PARALLELISM** – one or two lines of a verse repeat the thought of the preceding line or lines, using different words. Something new may be added in the 2nd line, but this is essentially a reinforcement or repetition of the thought that preceded. Notice in the psalm below that war in line 3 is a repetition of army in line 1. And “yet I will be confident” is a positive expression that communicates the same thought as “my heart shall not fear.”

PSALM 27:3

*Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.*

Here is another example of Synonymous thoughts in paired lines -

PSALM 29:10-11

¹⁰*The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.*
¹¹ **May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!**

- 2) **SYNTHETIC PARALLELISM** – in this type something new is added to the thought of the 1st line. Think of it as a “step” approach, where one moves from one thought (*step*) to another thought (*step*). The 2nd line typically provides a new insight to assist in understanding the meaning of the first line.

PSALM 27:9

Do not hide your face from me.

*Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.*

*Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!*

PSALM 91:14-16

Those who love me, I will deliver;

I will protect those who know my name.

¹⁵ *When they call to me, I will answer them;*

I will be with them in trouble,

I will rescue them and honor them.

¹⁶ *With long life I will satisfy them,*

and show them my salvation.

- 3) **COMPARATIVE PARALLELISM** – one thought is expressed with an image that is used figuratively to represent God, people, the nation, or the enemy. This form is often used when speaking about God’s actions or attributes. The form is almost like a miniature parable where a familiar concrete aspect of reality is used to express a profound, abstract truth about God or humanity. An element of repetition is also present. However, the images that are used in one line bring a new dimension to the meaning of the other line. In Psalm 103:11-13, printed below, the distances and emotions described are familiar, concrete images that are used to make a comparison to God’s Love, Forgiveness and Compassion!

PSALM 103:11-13

- ¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
¹³ As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

... also, examine this example of comparative parallelism, where the righteous are compared to trees

PSALM 92:12-15

- ¹² The righteous flourish like the palm tree,
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
¹³ They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴ In old age they still produce fruit;
they are always green and full of sap,
¹⁵ showing that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

- 4) **ANTITHETIC PARALLELISM** – in this type the 2nd line expresses a contradicting or opposite thought to the 1st line. It is not just a matter of saying something differently, it is a deliberate and emphatic message that is conveyed by using a contrasting point or an opposite way. (2nd reference uses GNT version of this vs.)

PSALM 27:10 –

- ¹⁰ If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.

Good News Translation (GNT)

- ¹⁰ My father and mother may abandon me,
but the LORD will take care of me.

- 5) **ACROSTIC PSALMS** – these psalms use the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first words of succeeding lines, verses, or stanzas begin with Hebrew letters in alphabetical order. (Since the psalms were all written in Hebrew, it is only in that language that the form is obvious)

Printed below is a good example of a secular acrostic poem, authored in 2010 by Lavender Leigh, constructed around the word: “A-C-R-O-S-T-I-C.” Enjoy!

Acrostically, I pen my verse
Crafting as I go
Romancing every line
Ordering the flow
Systematically perfected
The verses are refined
In every work I labor
Concerned with what's defined.

There are a total of 9 acrostic psalms. The best example in which to observe the acrostic form is Psalm 119. In that psalm, the 176 verses are divided into 22 stanzas of eight verses each. The first word of each verse in a stanza begins with the same Hebrew letter. In addition, each verse contains a synonym or metaphor for *Law*.

A good illustration follows in English, with an 8-line stanza, in which the 1st word of each line begins with an "A" and each line contains a synonym or metaphor for Bible. We speak this as today's concluding act of devotion

CLOSING PRAYER: (*unison*)

All Scripture speaks to us, O God
As we immerse ourselves in your story.
Alone we are unable to know the truth, so we
Ask that you will share with us your Good News.
Amarzing is your word that proclaims salvation for
All who would believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
Above all we are grateful for the Bible which
Appears to us as a lamp to guide our way.*

(*author – Donald L. Griggs, "Discovering the Psalms" Kerygma Press 1993)

(SAKLC 2013 per hjm)

PSALM SUGGESTIONS FOR PRIVATE READING AND REFLECTION DURING WEEK 2

<u>DAY</u>	<u>PSALM(s)</u>	<u>NOTES TO ACCOMPANY YOUR READING, REFLECTION and PRAYERS:</u>
1	19	Notice the 2 themes of this psalm: verses 1-6 and 7-14. If this were two psalms, which two types would the two sections represent? What other psalms do these two themes remind you of? What poetic forms do you recognize in this psalm?
2	27	Which psalm type does this one represent? Select one or two lines that express your faith in God. Memorize them so that you can keep the words in the forefront of your mind this week. In what ways have you found God to be a light or stronghold in your life?
3	29	What synonyms would you use for the words <i>glory</i> and <i>holy splendor</i> ? How do you interpret the use of the phrase <i>the voice of the Lord</i> ? With your understanding of God, what phrase might you use instead?
4	95	Underline or highlight all of the names and titles for God in this psalm. Select a name or title for God that you do not regularly use in your prayers and use it for the balance of this week as your way of addressing God in your prayers.
5	91	What image(s) of God do you see in this psalm? What names and titles? The psalm speaks of God’s protection. How do you sense this protection personally? What poetic forms do you recognize in this psalm?
6	103	The psalmist speaks of God’s <i>forgiveness</i> , <i>healing</i> and <i>redemption</i> . To what extent have you experienced these gifts of God? What is your response to these gifts? What metaphors would you use to describe the nature of <i>God’s love</i> , <i>forgiveness</i> and <i>compassion</i> ? What poetic forms do you recognize in this psalm?
7	145	This is an acrostic psalm. Each new verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in alphabetical order. You might make a list of all the actions and attributes of God by completing a sentence that begins: <i>“The Lord”</i> Look @ verse 18. Call upon the Lord so that you may be open to the possibility of experiencing what the psalmist affirms!

(SAKLC 2013 per hjm)